

Immunizations

Shots — or immunizations — are not just for children. Adults also need immunizations (vaccinations) to protect themselves from certain diseases. In fact, some shots are more important for older adults than they are for younger people.

What Types of Shots Do I Need?

Since older adults have a higher risk of getting certain diseases or developing complications from these diseases, there are immunizations that older adults should usually get:

- Flu shots
 - Pneumonia (Pneumococcal) vaccine
 - Tetanus-diphtheria (Td) Booster
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Why Do I Need a Flu Shot?



Influenza, better known as the flu, is an infection that is easily caught. It causes fever, chills, dry cough, sore throat, and a runny or stuffy nose, as well as headache, muscle aches, and often severe tiredness.

In the U.S. about 30 to 60 million people get the flu each year. Of those, about 100,000 are hospitalized, and some 36,000 die from complications.

Most people get better within a week or two, but the flu can lead to complications, such as pneumonia. This is more common in people over 65 and those with chronic medical conditions.

The flu vaccine prevents hospitalization and pneumonia about 50 to 60% of the time, and prevents death in older adults about 80% of the time.

Because of the risk factors, flu shots are recommended for:

- People over age 65 years old
- People of any age with a chronic medical condition such as diabetes, kidney disease, heart or lung disease

When Should I Get My Flu Shot?

The flu is most common in the U.S. in the winter. Ask your doctor for a flu shot between September and mid-November.

Because flu viruses change all the time, it is best to get a flu shot every year.

Do not get a flu shot before checking with your doctor if you:

- Are allergic to chicken eggs
- Have had a severe reaction to a flu shot in the past, including developing Guillain-Barre' syndrome (GBS) within 6 weeks after getting a flu shot. GBS is a disease of the nerve cells that results in muscle weakness and sometimes paralysis.

Why Do I Need a Pneumonia Vaccine?



Each year about 40,000 deaths occur in the U.S. due to the pneumococcal bacteria. This bacteria can cause a number of infections in the body, including:

- Pneumonia, in the lungs
- Bacteremia, in the blood
- Meningitis, in the covering of the brain

The vaccine covers about 85 to 90% of the strains of the pneumococcal bacteria. People who get the vaccine are protected about 60% of the time.

The pneumonia vaccine is recommended for:

- People over age 65 years old
- People of any age with a chronic medical condition such as diabetes, kidney disease, heart or lung disease
- People with a weak immune system such as people with cancer, organ transplants, or HIV infection

Doctors agree that these high-risk people should get the vaccine at least once. They disagree whether or not a second vaccine may be helpful.

Why Do I Need a Pneumonia Vaccine? continued

Some doctors recommend that a second dose be taken if a person received the vaccine more than 6 years ago and was less than 65 years old the first time the vaccine was given.

What Is a Td Booster?



Td stands for Tetanus-diphtheria. Most people get their first vaccine as a child, a shot usually called a DTP.

Largely as a result of routine immunization, tetanus and diphtheria have become very uncommon in the U.S. But, it is still important to have shots against these serious diseases.

For adults, a combination shot, called a “Td booster,” protects against both tetanus and diphtheria.

When to Get a Td Booster Shot

If you have a severe cut or puncture wound, and have not had a booster in the past 5 to 10 years, you should ask your doctor about one.

Generally, you should get a Td booster shot about every 10 years to protect yourself against these rare, but dangerous, illnesses. Mid-decade birthdays (55, 65, 75, and so forth) are good times to remember to do this.

Resources

Web Sites

<http://www.cdc.gov/aging/info.htm#5>

The Centers for Disease Control “Healthy Aging” section contains information on immunizations for adults.

<http://www.medlineplus.org>

Up-to-date, quality health care information. Go to Health Topics, “Immunizations.”

<http://www.niapublications.org/engagepages/shots.asp>

“Shots for Safety” is an “Age Page” on the National Institute on Aging Web site.